

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY SAYS CONGRESS MUST FIX USDA'S FAILED BEEF INSPECTION PROGRAM

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today spoke at a press conference to release a report that shows a systemic breakdown in the federal government's salmonella testing regimen for ground beef. The study by Public Citizen and the Government Accountability Project is the result of a five-month review of records from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) program.

"When the USDA introduced HACCP several years ago, it had an admirable goal of using science to control contamination," said Hinchey. "But the program has not been implemented properly. Frankly, as this study shows, USDA has been falling down on the job."

The study showed a breakdown in the federal government's main microbial testing program for ground beef, which began in 1998. Many of the largest ground beef plants in the United States repeatedly failed to meet the USDA's salmonella standard and were permitted to continue sending ground beef stamped as "USDA-approved to market."

"Ignoring food safety is serious business, with very real consequences for consumers," Hinchey added. "Thousands of Americans will get sick this year from contaminated meat products. We hope that none of these people will die, but it happens far too frequently."

"I commend the Government Accountability Project and Public Citizen for compiling this report to document the failures of HACCP. In light of their findings, Congress must act to tighten up USDA's inspection system. It's not enough for USDA to audit a lab manual or review plant records if they do not use their own test results to make slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants comply with the law and keep contaminated product off the market."